

THE VERMIN KILLER: 1775 MODEL

BY HARRY B. WEISS

In 1775 there was printed in London for S. Bladon of Lombard Street, a little book ($5\frac{1}{4} \times 3$ inches) of 52 pages entitled: "The Vermin-Killer: Being A very necessary Family-Book, Containing Exact Rules and Directions for the artificial killing and destroying all Manner of Vermin, *viz.* Bugs, Rats and Mice, Fleas and Lice, Moles, Pismires, Flies, Catterpillars, Snakes, Weasles, Frogs, etc. Whereunto is added, The Art of taking all Kinds of Fish and Fowl, with many other Things never before known."

The author of this treatise, one W. W., wrote in the preface that he had brought his material together because, many times, mankind is more disturbed by small and inconsiderable insects than by the more noble species of sensitive creatures. Furthermore the "infallible remedies" laid down by him were deduced not only from the writings of learned and judicious authors, but also from the constant experiences of various persons who had tried the remedies and had benefited therefrom.

The remedies in this little book are typical of the brand of economic entomology that flourished before anyone thought of bringing "economic" and "entomology" together, and at a time when the entomologists themselves were not concerned with such a "low" phase of their subject.

Because of their quaintness some of these remedies are reproduced herewith just as they appear in "The Vermin-Killer."

To kill Bugs

Take a convenient quantity of fresh tar, mix it with the juice of wild cucumber, let it stand a day or two, stirring it four or five times in a day, then annoint the bedsteads with it, and all the bugs will die.

Another

Take the gall of an ox, and mix it with vinegar, and rub the cracks and joints of the bedstead with it, and all the bugs will die in a short time.

Another

Take a quantity of brimstone, beat it to powder, then mix the powder with old oil, and use it as before.

Another

Take strong glue, and boil it with vinegar, and rub the bedsteads with it, and the bugs will certainly die.

Another

Take quick-silver and mix it with hog's grease, of each a like quantity, use it as before.

To kill Pismires

Take the roots of wild cucumbers, and set them on fire where the pismires are, and the smoke will kill them.

To drive away Pismires

Take an earthen dish, full of pismires and the earth where they are, and make a good fire, and put the earthen pot on the fire, and the pismires will not remain near that place.

Another

Take mussel shells, burn them with storax, and beat them to a small powder, and straw the powder where the pismires usually are, as the great banks, and they will all come out of their holes, and kill them.

To keep the Sugar box or Spice from the Pismires

Cover your sugar box with white wool, or annoint it with rubica.

To kill Fleas

Take wormwood, and the root of wild cucumber, and boil them in pickle, and sprinkle it in the room, and it will certainly kill the fleas.

Another

Take soap lees, and boil two or three onions in it, let it cool, then sprinkle the room with it, and it kills the fleas.

Another

Take lee and she-goat's milk, and it is an infallible remedy.

To gather all the Fleas together that are in the Room

Take an earthen pot, and cut a hole in the floor of the room, so big as the pot may stand with the mouth even with the floor of the room, then take the blood of an ox, and mix it with the soot of a chimney, and rub it in the inside of the pot, and all the fleas will come into the pot in a day's time.

Another

Take a small piece of wood, as big as a man's arm, and rub it over with hog's grease, and all the fleas will gather to it, if you lay it in the middle of a room.

Another

Take the blood of a bear or badger, and put it under the bed as before, and it gathers the fleas to it, and they die immediately.

To kill Lice

Take salt water and rub the afflicted places with it, or vinegar, or onion, and mix in it allum and aloes, and therewith annoint the place.

Another

Take hog's lard, quicksilver, and sage, as much of each as is needful, mix them together to a salve, and annoint the afflicted places.

To kill crab Lice

Take a roasted apple, and take the skin and core from it, and beat it in a mortar with as much quicksilver as will make it into an ointment, and therewith dress the afflicted places.

To kill Caterpillars

Take fig leaves ashes, and cast it on the root, and it destroys caterpillars.

Another

Take a gallon of crabs, and steep them ten days in water, and sprinkle the trees with the water, and it kills the caterpillar.

Another

Take a quart of the morning-dew, and mix in it verdegrease, or for want of that, take such a quantity of the juice of four

crabs, and mix a little verdegrease in it, sprinkle the root, branch, or place so infected and it certainly kills them.

To kill Flies

Take white hellebore, and steep it in sweet milk, mix with it orpiment, and sprinkle the room, and places where the flies come, and they will all die.

To gather the Flies together

Take a deep earthen pot, and lay in it beaten colliander, and all the flies in the house shall be gathered together.

To keep Cattle from injury by Flies

Anoint the beast with oil, wherein bakeler hath been boiled, and the flies shall not come near him.

The compounds advocated for insect control in "The Vermin Killer," include tar, vinegar, ox gall, ox blood, sulphur, glue, oil, hog's grease, wax, quicksilver, soap dregs, lime, goat's milk, salt water, alum, olive oil, ashes of fig leaves, saltpetre, sheep's dung, verdegreis, mussel shells, red orpiment and botanical remedies involving the use of wild cucumbers, ivy, wormwood, rue, white hellebore, Marjoram, Lupine, Daphne, mustard seed, aloes, lavender, Amaranthus, Scilla, Scolopendrium, etc.

At first glance these may seem to be more antiquated than they really are. As a matter of fact, the forerunner of the economic entomologist had at his disposal, oil, glue, sulphur, mercury, arsenic, soap lime, etc., even though he did not use them as knowingly or as intelligently as they are being used today.

The non-entomological remedies in "The Vermin Killer" are of the same type as the entomological ones. "To gather together all the Rats and Mice into one Place in a House or Barn, and to kill them," one was supposed to "Take two or three living rats or mice, and put them into an earthen pot, then stop the pot close, that the rats or mice cannot come forth, then make a fire of ashen-tree wood, and place the pot on the fire, when it burneth moderately, and all the rats and mice in the house, hearing the cry of those in the pot, will run immediately to the place where the pot standeth on the fire, as if they did intend by force to deliver the rats and mice in the pot."

I have not attempted to identify W. W. who wrote "The Vermin Killer." It would be interesting to know if he made other economic contributions to entomology and also something of his entomological life but—an ocean, and the 162 years between me and his uncertain literary remains are obstacles which I have no ambition to overcome at this time.